

Absenteeism is major flaw of the BLCC

The Basic Law Consultative Committee has survived its first year — but not without problems. YAN MEI-NING has carried out a special investigation.

THE attendance record of Lord Kadoorie last year reflects a fatal structural problem facing the Basic Law Consultative Committee (BLCC), though the committee has four more years to go before its term expires.

Although Lord Kadoorie has signed the 71 BLCC members' proposal on the future political system and turned up at press conferences to explain the proposal, his appearances in BLCC meetings throughout last year were minimal.

Lord Kadoorie did not attend the first or the second BLCC general meetings. And as an executive committee member, he has attended only one out of the eight executive committee meetings so far held. Neither has he joined any of the BLCC's eight special groups.

As long as Lord Kadoorie shows up for the coming general meeting, he will comply with the BLCC's regulations.

All BLCC members serve on the committee in their personal capacity. The only regulation they have to comply with is not to be absent from the committee's general meetings three consecutive times without sufficient reason.

An active member pointed out this had become a major factor hindering the committee's performance in its first year.

"As most of the members have been chosen because of their active participation and outstanding performance in the community, all of them are very busy," the member said.

"There is no binding rule on BLCC members' roles and duties; it is entirely up to their own initiative to contribute," he explained.

"It is a new experience for Hongkong to have such a big consultative body with no statutory power. Members are not under any pressure to get any job done.

"It is worse still with some people who only joined for prestige reasons," the member added.

A Basic Law Drafting Committee (BLDC) member who helped set up the BLCC once complained to the press that many people had invited him to dinners during the BLCC formation period to enquire about the possibility of becoming a BLCC member.

According to the *Sunday Standard's* calculations, as many as 14 BLCC members, as well as some BLDC members,

have not joined any of the eight special groups. These eight special groups were set up to study the drafting of the Basic Law during the periods between BLCC general meetings.

In other words, these members' participation will be confined to the general meetings, held twice a year, though they can send opinions to the BLCC at any time they wish.

Only around 20 members, mostly political activists and trade union leaders, have joined four or more special groups. Of course, joining a group does not guarantee attendance.

So far, attendance for general meetings has been quite satisfactory. Only 19 and 25 members, out of a total of 180, failed to turn up for the first and second general meetings respectively.

But shortly before special group meetings came to a stop in August, it had become common to find that only one third or one-quarter of the group members turned up for meetings.

The following story of what a *Sunday Standard* reporter encountered in an interview illustrates the degree of participation by some members.

A businessman had to check with his secretary before telling the reporter which groups he had joined.

The reporter was surprised because the groups he mentioned did not include the Finance and Economic Special Group. The businessman then went on to explain in detail why he had chosen not to join that group.

But a check through the namelist afterward disclosed that the businessman was in fact on the group.

As well as their degree of involvement, the representativeness of members is another problem.

Apart from some outstanding individuals, most members were appointed because they held responsible positions

in associations and societies. Usually they are chairmen re-elected on a yearly basis.

Already in the BLCC's first year some members have stepped down from their posts and no longer enjoy much support from members of their groups.

Unless they resign voluntarily, neither the BLCC nor their associations have any means to replace them.

The way BLCC members perceive their role also presents a problem.

"Some members only concentrate on their own problems and never take other aspects of the community into account," a member said, quoting the example of a key figure in financial circles.

It has also been pointed out that members have concentrated too much on putting forward their own views, and neglected a major function stated in the constitution.

The constitution requires members to "widely collect views and suggestions on the Basic Law from different sectors of the community and reflect them to the Drafting Committee ..."

This neglect has been reflected in the recent teaming up of BLCC members to put forward various proposed future political models.

The *Sunday Standard* understands that

a BLCC office-bearer asked in a recent executive committee meeting for BLCC members to stop soliciting support from fellow members, to avoid further polarisation and confrontation.

And Mr Philip Kwok, a key member of the group of 71 and a BLCC vice-chairman, was challenged by another vice-chairman in an executive committee meeting. He was accused of belittling the BLCC because they had sent their first draft proposal to the BLDC direct, instead of through the BLCC.

The BLCC has encountered another major problem when it comes to collecting opinions from the public.

Most members complain that lack of interest in the Basic Law among the

general public has hindered their work of consultation.

"Though the BLCC members have engaged in heated debates over the future political system, most professionals have showed little interest in it," said Mr Leung Chun-ying, a professional sitting in the BLCC executive committee.

"Two meetings were arranged last year for fellow surveyors to discuss the drafting of the Basic Law, but only just over a dozen turned up each time," said Mr Leung.

A civil servant said it was difficult for him to arouse the interest of his colleagues because they did not think it appropriate for civil servants to be actively involved.

A lawyer said many of his colleagues would rather earn more money as security measure than get involved in politics.

A BLCC vice-chairman, Mr Lee Kai-ming, also pointed out that the response had been far from satisfactory for the monthly "meet the public" sessions and public hearings.

Only a dozen people turned up for the former and he had to get his fellow trade union members to attend the latter occasion to ensure a decent turn-out.

But Mr Lee is optimistic that the work of the BLCC will shape up when the committee has more concrete things to discuss, for example when the draft proposals come out.